



Research on the Causes and Countermeasures of Psychological Problems among Rural Left-behind Children

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords

Rural left-behind children
Psychological problems
Cause analysis
Solution countermeasures

Published

16 March 2025

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the psychological problems of rural left-behind children and conducts an in-depth analysis of their causes through questionnaire surveys, etc. It also proposes corresponding solutions. The research finds that the lack of parental companionship, improper parenting methods, and social environmental factors are the key factors leading to the psychological problems of left-behind children. These problems manifest as emotional instability, bad behavioral habits, and social barriers etc. It is necessary to coordinate efforts from multiple aspects, such as family education, school education, social care, policy support, and legal protection, to jointly promote the healthy psychological development of left-behind children.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

With the rapid development of China's economy and the continuous advancement of urbanization, large-scale population mobility has become a prominent feature of the social transformation period. A large number of rural laborers leave their hometowns to work in cities in pursuit of better economic incomes and living standards. According to relevant data, as of 2021, the number of rural left-behind children in China has reached 11.992 million. Against this social background, the group of left-behind children is growing. Due to the long-term absence of their parents, they face many difficulties in life, study, and mental health. Psychological problems are

Citation: Chen, Y., Zhong, S., & Lu, W. (2025). Research on the Causes and Countermeasures of Psychological Problems among Rural Left-behind Children. *The Journal of Interactive Social Sciences*, 1(1), 17–26.

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<https://doi.org/10.64744/tjiss.2025.6>

gradually emerging and have become the focus of widespread attention from all sectors of society. These problems not only have a profound impact on the growth and development of left-behind children as individuals but also are related to the harmony and stability of the entire society. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to deeply study the psychological problems of rural left-behind children and explore effective countermeasures.

1.2 Research Objectives and Significance

This research aims to comprehensively and deeply understand the current situation of psychological problems among rural left-behind children, analyze their causes, and propose practical and feasible countermeasures. Through this research, it is expected to provide a theoretical basis and practical guidance for improving the mental health of left-behind children, helping them overcome psychological barriers and grow up healthy and happy. From a social perspective, solving the psychological problems of left-behind children helps to promote social fairness and justice and drive the harmonious development of society. From an educational perspective, it can provide a reference for rural education reform and development, improve the education system, and enhance the quality of education. From a family perspective, it can increase parents' awareness of the mental health problems of left-behind children, improve the level of family education, and build a good parent-child relationship.

2. Current Situation of Psychological Problems among Left-Behind Children

The author conducted a questionnaire survey on the psychological problems of rural left-behind children in rural schools, communities, and other places in Fuzhou City, Fujian Province. At the same time, interviews were held with some left-behind children, parents, teachers, and social figures. Through reliability and validity analysis, the data were ensured to be reliable. After statistics, analysis, and summary, the main problems of rural left-behind children at present are as follows.

2.1 Emotional Issues

Studies have revealed that rural left-behind children generally exhibit a range of emotional disorders, including heightened anxiety, introversion, intense emotional fluctuations, and self-exile, among other phenomena. Specific indicators show that compared with non-left-behind children, left-behind children score significantly higher in terms of loneliness and feelings of inferiority. Meanwhile, evidence within academic literature further indicates that left-behind children exhibit numerous predicaments in emotionally associated behavioral manifestations. These emotional disturbances are particularly salient when they confront diverse challenges in academic endeavors and daily life, readily precipitating negative psychological responses, while also lacking the proactive confidence and courage to navigate adversities (Guo, 2025). In cases of subpar academic performance, some left-behind children may succumb to prolonged self-denial, fostering doubts about their self-worth, which in turn precipitates a mentality of fear and evasion toward learning. Such emotional and behavioral issues exert a certain degree of adverse impact on their physical and mental well-being.

2.2 Behavioral Issues

The rural social environment is somewhat complex. Due to their immature cognitive and stress-resistance abilities, left-behind children are prone to negative influences from bad social trends during their growth. For instance, in some rural areas, there exist negative trends such as gambling and feudal superstition. Left-behind children who are long exposed to such

environments may imitate and accept these bad behaviors, which is detrimental to the formation of their values. Moreover, cultural and recreational facilities in rural areas are relatively scarce, and space resources are limited. As a result, left-behind children lack rich and healthy intellectual activities during their spare time and are likely to be addicted to electronic entertainment products such as mobile games and TV viewing, which in turn affects their all-around physical and mental development.

2.3 Social Issues

In the educational and developmental journeys of rural left-behind adolescents, "parent-child separation" and "intergenerational caregiving" stand as prominent features. These exert a profound impact on socialization processes—encompassing psychological development, behavioral patterns, and social interactions—manifesting as distinct social impairments (Nie & Gu, 2025). Specifically, this is manifested in their hesitations when proactively articulating their own wishes, their avoidance of reciprocal communication, and their display of shyness and withdrawal in interpersonal interactions. Furthermore, some left-behind children are reluctant to participate in collective activities at school, maintain distant relationships with classmates, and struggle to forge stable bonds of friendship. Such social impairments not only impede their current adaptation to life but also may exert adverse effects on their future capacity for social integration and adaptability (Zhang, 2024).

2.4 Self-awareness Issues

Adolescence is a crucial stage for an individual's self-awareness and personality development. During this period, left-behind children often exhibit complex and diverse psychological contradictions. Due to the prolonged absence of their parents compared to their peers, this becomes an important factor that triggers feelings of envy, jealousy, and inferiority. At the same time, they can understand the practical significance of their parents' going out to work and realize that it is for the economic support of the family. If these psychological conflicts are not adjusted in a timely and reasonable manner, they may lead to a tendency towards introversion in personality, deviations in self-awareness, low self-evaluation, and doubts about personal abilities, thereby affecting the construction of self-confidence and the stable development of mental health.

3. Analysis of the Causes of Psychological Problems among Left-Behind Children

3.1 Familial Factors

Parents stand as the most pivotal stewards and mentors in a child's developmental journey. Yet, amid the ongoing progression of urbanization coupled with the financial pressures on individual families, a large contingent of rural surplus laborers has opted to migrate to cities in search of employment. As a result, left-behind children are deprived of the nurturance, affection, and instruction typically afforded by normal parent-child households; moreover, they often find themselves shouldering the heavy burden of family subsistence (Wei & Wang, 2025). During the critical stages of a child's development—such as early childhood and adolescence—parental absence leaves children in a state of emotional insecurity, rendering them unable to form stable parent-child attachments. Protracted emotional deprivation fosters a profound sense of loneliness within them; when confronting adversities and setbacks, they lack parents to confide in or rely on, forced instead to bear the burden alone, inflicting severe detriment upon their mental well-being.

Many left-behind children, when ill, can only endure physical discomfort in silence, their hearts harboring unfulfilled yearnings for parental care. Such experiences leave them overwhelmed by helplessness and despair, and over time, they are prone to developing psychological issues.

The caregiving modalities for left-behind children primarily encompass intergenerational upbringing, foster care, boarding school care, and self-care, among others. In intergenerational upbringing, elderly family members, often due to disparities in age and ideological outlooks, tend to overindulge children—relaxing their demands and loosening their principles, which readily fosters undesirable behavioral habits and a capricious mindset (Liu, 2025). In foster care settings, foster families may, due to various reasons, provide insufficient attention and guidance to left-behind children, giving rise to their proneness to issues such as paranoia and interpersonal difficulties. While boarding school care addresses the livelihood issues of left-behind children to a certain extent, the limitations in school management and care leave these children confronting substantial challenges in terms of depression, anxiety, academic stress, and psychological imbalance. As for self-care, given the children's young age and their lack of life experience and self-management capabilities, they struggle to ensure the quality and efficacy of their upbringing.

3.2 School-related Factors

3.2.1 Inadequacy of Educational Resources

Rural schools suffer from a scarcity of qualified teaching staff, with specialized mental health educators being exceedingly rare. Nevertheless, as mental health education stands as a top priority in school moral education, schools ought to proceed from their own realities, overcome all obstacles, utilize all available resources, and conduct regular mental health education sessions for children (Chen, A. W., 2025). Compared with urban schools, rural schools have a comparatively smaller contingent of teachers, and their professional competencies vary significantly. A great many rural teachers lack specialized knowledge and skills in mental health education, rendering them unable to effectively provide psychological counseling to left-behind children. Rural schools are also plagued by outdated teaching facilities and crude conditions, failing to provide left-behind children with a sound learning environment and diverse educational activities. This, to a certain extent, undermines their academic motivation and the development of their mental health (Wang, 2024).

3.2.2 Irrational Curriculum Design

Currently, the curriculum arrangements and textbook contents at the national compulsory education stage are largely modeled on urban education, being severely disconnected from rural realities. In the learning process, rural left-behind children, due to a lack of knowledge and experiences relevant to their actual life contexts, struggle to comprehend and master textbook contents, which leads to subpar academic performance and thereby fosters feelings of inferiority.

In terms of school curriculum design, insufficient emphasis is placed on mental health education. Mental health courses are often occupied by other core subjects or remain a mere formality, failing to truly address the psychological needs of left-behind children.

3.2.3 Insufficient Home-School Communication

The psychological support initiatives for left-behind children and children in difficult circumstances cannot rely solely on the school; they necessitate collective engagement from families and society. Hence, the establishment of a home-school co-education mechanism is of particular significance (Jia, 2024). However, in practical scenarios, due to the parents of

left-behind children working away from home and their contact information frequently changing, communication between schools and families is hindered. When issues arise with left-behind children at school, schools are unable to reach their parents in a timely manner to jointly deliberate on solutions. Yet, regarding the temporary guardians of left-behind children—their grandparents—against the backdrop of adjustments to family planning policies, prolonged life expectancy, and rising living costs, grandparental care for grandchildren will become the norm, and the dominant position of intergenerational care will not shift in the short term (Chang, 2024). Owing to their relatively low educational attainment, these grandparents lack sufficient emphasis on their grandchildren's educational issues and struggle to engage in effective communication and collaboration with schools. This results in the failure to promptly address the educational problems of left-behind children, thereby further impinging on their mental well-being(Xing, 2019).

3.3 Social Factors

The social milieu in rural areas is relatively intricate, and left-behind children, deficient in adequate judgment and resilience, are prone to being influenced by deleterious phenomena. Certain rural regions are afflicted with pernicious trends such as gambling and feudal superstitions. Left-behind children, residing in such a milieu over the long term, may imitate these harmful behaviors, exerting a detrimental impact on the formation of their values and behavioral habits. Furthermore, recreational facilities and venues in rural areas are relatively scarce. Left-behind children, lacking wholesome and beneficial activities during after-school hours, tend to indulge in mobile games, television, and the like, thereby incurring adverse impacts on their physical and mental development (Chen, S. S., 2025).

Contemporary society's attention and support for left-behind children remain insufficient, with relevant care service systems yet to be fully refined. While some social organizations and volunteers occasionally conduct activities aimed at caring for left-behind children, such initiatives often lack continuity and systematicity, failing to fundamentally address the issues confronting these children. All sectors of society exhibit insufficient awareness of the mental health issues among left-behind children, coupled with a lack of effective intervention measures and professional psychological support. Consequently, when these children encounter psychological predicaments, they are unable to secure timely and effective assistance(Cui & Xiao, 2022).

4. Countermeasures to Solve the Psychological Problems of Left-Behind Children

4.1 Strengthen Family Education Guidance

Carry out family education training activities that combine online and offline methods, such as holding special lectures and opening online courses, to popularize the importance and scientific methods of family education to the parents of left-behind children. Let parents realize that even if they work away, they cannot neglect the education and care of their children. They should actively communicate with their children and pay attention to their psychological changes. Family education experts can be invited to give lectures through live-streaming platforms, explaining how to communicate effectively with children, how to cultivate children's good morals and behavior habits, etc., so that parents can learn scientific education methods anytime and anywhere.

Encourage parents to use modern communication technologies, such as telephones and video calls, to communicate with their children regularly. When communicating, parents should listen carefully to their children's voices, understand their needs in study, life, and mental health, and give them emotional support and encouragement. Parents should try to arrange time to visit their hometowns and communicate face-to-face with their children to enhance the parent-child relationship. For example, parents can have a fixed video call with their children every week, care about their children's study situation, and share their own life experiences in the city, so that children can feel the love and concern of their parents.

4.2 Optimize School Education Support

4.2.1 Enhance the development of the teaching faculty for mental health education.

Schools should increase the cultivation and introduction of mental health education teaching staff, and improve the professional qualities and abilities of teachers. Teachers can be organized to participate in mental health education training courses, academic seminars, etc., so that they can master advanced mental health education concepts and methods. Encourage teachers to conduct research on mental health education and explore psychological counseling models suitable for left-behind children. Schools can also hire professional psychological counselors to regularly provide psychological counseling services for left-behind children and establish a sound mental health education service system.

4.2.2 Refine the Curriculum Design

Schools should, in light of the practical circumstances of rural left-behind children, adjust the curriculum structure and incorporate teaching content relevant to the realities of rural life, thereby rendering the curriculum more practical and engaging (Song et al., 2023). In the teaching of subjects such as Chinese and mathematics, cases rooted in rural life can be incorporated to facilitate students' better comprehension of knowledge. Concurrently, efforts should be made to strengthen the development of mental health education courses, ensuring sufficient class hours and quality standards, with mental health education permeated throughout the entire process of school teaching and education. Through such courses, left-behind children can be helped to foster a sound self-perception, master skills in emotional regulation and interpersonal interaction, and enhance their psychological adaptability.

4.2.3 Enhance home-school collaboration

Schools should establish and improve the home-school cooperation mechanism, and strengthen communication and contact with the families of left-behind children. Regularly hold parent-teacher meetings to provide feedback on children's study and living conditions to parents and listen to their opinions and suggestions. Use modern information technology, such as WeChat official accounts and class groups, to timely convey the school's education and teaching information and children's performance at school to parents, so that parents can keep abreast of their children's situations. Schools can also organize home-visit activities to deeply understand the family environment and growth background of left-behind children, and jointly discuss methods and strategies for educating children with parents to form a home-school education synergy.

4.3 Increase Social Care

Encourage social organizations and volunteers to actively participate in the action of caring for left-behind children and carry out various forms of assistance activities. Organize volunteers to provide study tutoring, life assistance, and psychological companionship for left-behind children. Volunteers can regularly visit the homes or schools of left-behind children, help them

solve problems in their studies, chat with them, and play games with them, so that they can feel the care and warmth of society. Establish a long-term assistance mechanism between volunteers and left-behind children to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of the assistance activities.

The government and all sectors of society should increase the construction and investment in left-behind children's care centers, integrate social resources, and provide one-stop services for left-behind children. The care centers can be equipped with functional areas such as study rooms, activity rooms, and psychological counseling rooms to provide after-school custody, interest cultivation, psychological counseling, and other services for left-behind children. The care centers can also organize rich and colorful activities, such as parent-child activities and outdoor development activities, to enhance the feelings between left-behind children and their parents and peers, enrich their after-school lives, and promote their physical and mental health development.

4.4 Perfecting the Policy Safeguard System

In 2025, the Central Government's No. 1 Document proposed expanding the coverage of rescue and protection institutions for minors and enhancing the quality of care services for left-behind children and children in difficult circumstances; the Government Work Report put forward strengthening care services for children in difficult circumstances, migrant children, and left-behind children(Wan, 2025). At the current stage, educational imbalances still persist in remote rural areas, which calls for certain policy inclinations and financial support from the state. Meanwhile, it is necessary to elevate the economic development level of remote rural areas, clarify specific and feasible tasks and measures, improve and upgrade the nine-year compulsory education in such regions, vigorously invest in the construction of educational and teaching facilities, and augment support and incentives for education in remote rural areas(Jia, 2024). Augment the faculty staffing in rural schools, enhance teachers' remuneration, and attract outstanding educators to teach in rural areas. Furthermore, efforts should be made to strengthen the infrastructure development of rural schools, refine teaching facilities and equipment, and provide a sound learning environment for left-behind children(Song, 2024). The government may establish specialized educational funds to be allocated to the renovation of rural school premises, the procurement of teaching instruments and equipment, and other such initiatives, thereby narrowing the urban-rural educational gap.

Establish relief funds for left-behind children to provide support in both life and academic pursuits for impoverished left-behind children. Such relief funds can be mobilized through channels such as government appropriations and social donations, serving to subsidize these children's tuition fees and living expenses, as well as the provision of school supplies and daily necessities. For left-behind children facing family financial hardships due to special circumstances, targeted assistance shall be rendered to ensure their smooth completion of studies.

Introduce relevant policies to encourage enterprises and social organizations to participate in care efforts for left-behind children. For enterprises and social organizations actively engaging in activities aimed at caring for left-behind children, certain policy incentives and recognition awards shall be granted to stimulate the enthusiasm of all sectors of society in participation. Enterprises donating funds or materials for the care of left-behind children shall be offered preferential policies such as tax reductions; social organizations that have made outstanding contributions in caring for left-behind children shall receive public recognition and publicity to enhance their social reputation.

4.5 Improve the Legal Protection Mechanism

Develop specific laws and regulations to clarify the rights and obligations of left-behind children, as well as the responsibilities of guardians, schools, society, and other parties. Formulate specific punishment measures for behaviors that violate the rights and interests of left-behind children to enhance the deterrent power of the law. Clearly stipulate that parents or other guardians must fulfill their responsibilities for raising, educating, and supervising left-behind children. Severely crack down on behaviors such as abandonment and abuse of left-behind children, and legally pursue the legal responsibilities of relevant personnel.

Strengthen the publicity of laws and regulations for protecting left-behind children to raise the legal awareness of all sectors of society regarding the protection of the rights and interests of left-behind children. Through legal publicity activities such as legal lectures and legal consultations, enable left-behind children, their guardians, school teachers, and the public to understand relevant laws and regulations, and enhance their awareness of protecting the rights and interests of left-behind children in accordance with the law. Strengthen law enforcement supervision and establish a sound supervision mechanism for the protection of the rights and interests of left-behind children to ensure the effective implementation of laws and regulations. Timely detection and handling of behaviors that violate the rights and interests of left-behind children to effectively safeguard their legitimate rights and interests.

5. Conclusion

The psychological problems of rural left-behind children are complex social issues involving multiple levels, such as families, schools, and society. Through the investigation of the current situation of psychological problems among left-behind children and the analysis of their causes, this study has proposed a series of targeted countermeasures. To solve the psychological problems of left-behind children, it requires the joint efforts of families, schools, society, and the government to form a synergy. Strengthen family education guidance, enhance parents' awareness of education, and strengthen parent - child communication; optimize school education support, strengthen the construction of the mental health education teaching staff, improve the curriculum setting, and strengthen home - school cooperation; increase social care, organize volunteer assistance activities, and establish left - behind children's care centers; improve the policy support system, increase investment in education, establish relief funds, and encourage social participation; improve the legal protection mechanism, improve laws and regulations, and strengthen legal publicity and law enforcement supervision. Only through the coordinated efforts of multiple aspects can a good growth environment be created for left-behind children, promoting their mental health development and enabling every left-behind child to have a bright future. Future research can further explore the differences in psychological problems among left-behind children in different regions and age groups, as well as more targeted intervention measures, and continuously improve the care service system for left-behind children. Pay attention to the long - term follow - up research on the psychological problems of left-behind children, evaluate the actual effects of various countermeasures, and provide a more solid basis for policy-making and practical improvement.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to all respondents who participated in this study.

Funding

There is no fundings for this work.

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